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ABSTRACT

The teaching of the Chinese language in the United States needs first to depart from the classical attitude that the sole goal is research, and to include among its objectives the occupational needs of all types of learners. To meet the problem of student "nomadism" at home and abroad, there should be certification of all transfers in terms of generally accepted standards of content and proficiency. The entire gamut of facilities in Chinese from high school through college and into graduate years and including summer sessions and full-time programs should be studied to determine the most effective calendars for acquiring the needed language tools. In the interest of teaching efficiency and the promotion of interest in study, newer techniques and gadgets should be appropriately introduced into the academic program. Group action is needed in these four areas. (Suggested levels of spoken vocabulary for the first four years and a modified version of the Foreign Service Institute's competence scale are given in this paper.) (Author/AMM)

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ARTICULATION IN PROGRAMS OF CHINESE LANGUAGE

by

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Paper written especially for the ERIC Clearinghouse for Linguistics

ARTICULATION IN PROGRAMS OF CHINESE LANGUAGE

Last summer I had the pleasure of visiting the Language Centers of Nanyang University in Singapore and New Asia College in Hongkong as 'consultant'. Evaluation of these programs in the field raised questions in my mind regarding the programs 'back home' from which many of the students had come. The problems were not new to me, but seeing these American students in Asia drove home anew the conclusion that Chinese studies in American institutions are in certain respects missing the mark.

Language Readiness

On talking with these students, my first reaction was to wonder how some of them had ever been deemed qualified linguistically for a year of study in Asia supported by public funds. For what were they qualified? To hire a pedacab and shop for curios? To converse with a native on topics of everyday life? One should indeed expect that much from the 'two years of Chinese' required of all applicants for a grant, but hardly that it would fulfill the expectations of one ambitious student who aimed to step right into a university lecture course given in Chinese (and not pure Mandarin at that), understand its content and participate in the discussion - also carried on in Chinese. On what <u>standards</u> had the selection committee considered him qualified?

The basic requirement of 'two year of Chinese' reflects our current pattern. The student ordinarily begins his Chinese in college, possibly not until junior year. He applies for study abroad after attaining the graduate level. Any third year of language he may have had probably stressed reading

rather than speaking. His professors in Asian Studies may possibly have made an occasional reading assignment in Chinese materials, but they certainly never discussed them in Chinese. What is strange is not that the student craved to attend lectures given in Chinese, but that he was considered linguistically qualified.

I was reminded of an experience a decade ago when funds were made available for sending graduate students to Taiwan for the stated purpose of 'improving proficiency in spoken Mandarin', a move made to counterbalance the tendency in advanced courses to stress reading over speaking. To qualify, the student must have attained the third year graduate level and have had 'two years of Chinese'. He was to go to the National University in Taipei and attend lecture courses given in Chinese. Sitting on the planning committee, I was shocked at the casual assumption that 'two years of Chinese' - taken at any institution - would enable one to follow a Chinese lecture. Others shared my doubt, but the project was approved and the first group of six students flew to Taiwan and the university lecture hall.

In a few weeks letters from the field informed us that the beneficiaries couldn't make head or tail of the lectures, requesting the diversion of funds to the hiring of tutors. This was promptly granted, there being little choice in the matter.

The following summer the Institute of Far Eastern Languages at Yale University was asked to provide a six-week course concentrating on comprehension: the selectees listened to a series of graded talks, reviewed them from tape recordings, and discussed the content in Chinese - a simulation of the normal procedure in a university course. They spent six hours a day at this execise and departed for Taiwan late in August. Their reports differed notably in tone

from those of the first group, exulting in the fact that on arrival they experienced little difficulty in comprehension. One claimed that his comprehension level was fully equal to that of students who had spent a year in Taipei under a tutor. This program, initiated by a foundation grant, has since evolved into a permanent facility under the aegis of Stanford University, serving as a remedial agency in tool language and a guide to graduate students in the field.

In the case of the students I talked with last summer at Nanyang University and at New Asia College, there had been no equivalent attention to tool language. The programs in East Asia lacked authenticated data regarding each student's level of competence. Their normal programs were not prepared to receive students on an ungraded gamut of language competence, so makeshift tutoring was resorted to, guided more by the individual student's reaction to hot weather than by goal or plan.

The programs of the Language Centers in Singapore and Hongkong are sound and healthy programs, well planned and effectively taught, but both suffer from lack of articulation with the sending agencies back in the States. The initiative in establishing standard certification of students going abroad should lie with the American colleges.

Expanding Objectives

Our Chinese language offerings were scarce before 1941, totaling perhaps a dozen, and geared to the task of producing in four years students able to read the Confucian Classics and take up sinological research. Research still demands of the student extensive and intensive familiarity with the Chinese characters and literary styles, but this must be supplemented by a high degree of competence in the spoken language at a cultural level. It must no longer

be said, as it was a generation ago, that some sinological scholars could read anything in Chinese but couldn't carry on a sophisticated discussion with a Chinese scholar in his own language.

Today however, the greater demand is for what we may term a Communication Type language program, in which primary stress is placed on speaking and comprehension, but which does not neglect the ability to read current writings appropriate to the learner's occupational goal. Diplomatic personnel, missionaries, social service workers, and business agents, all require adult competence in speaking. Reading, while essential, should not be primarily classical.

For better or worse, there is a third species of student who seeks only to understand and to speak in a limited range of the colloquial. A vast number of military personnel have been trained in the last two decades for tasks as limited as 'proctoring the air': they tune in on the China Mainland, press a button to tape-record anything of possible military value, and leave the results to be analyzed by more highly trained personnel. The ability to read characters was deemed unnecessary, though I finally persuaded the Air Force that a mild introduction to characters would give zest to the sometimes dull routine. In this category we may also place the tourist and other language dilettentes who wish to be able to ask their way, hire a taxi, and bargain for curios.

Program

To meet such diverse needs, a standard program needs to offer all requisite types of language instruction at levels established by common agreement. Elementary materials in the colloquial - both spoken and written - should form a common base from which the work of the third and fourth years will diverge selectively in terms of specific goals. Content might be defined

in terms such as these:

Year 1
Year 2 Spoken vocabulary of 1500-2000 words; all structural patterns needed in daily conversation; recognition of 1500 characters with 60% recall for writing; ready comprehension of non-technical conversation.

Year 3 Spoken vocabulary of 2500-3000 words; recognition of 2500 characters; ability to read and discuss in Chinese such materials as appear in newspapers and non-classical writings.

Year 4 Spoken vocabulary of 3500 words; recognition of 3500 characters; ability to read literary and classical materials and to comprehend and discuss university lectures.

It may be claimed that programs approximating this pattern exist already in the majority of our institutions of learning. True, but there are no nationally accepted standards as to a) range of vocabulary, b) proportion of speaking to reading, or c) the level at which newspaper reading and classical styles are introduced. It is these areas of vagueness which raise problems in the transfer of students from one institution to another, at home and abroad.

Class Periods

Given a standard for course content, there remains the need for more uniformity in time measures: how many minutes to a class period, and how many hours a week are scheduled? The predominant 'hour' is 50 minutes. Before 1941 most courses called for 3 periods per week - now raised to five. The advent of language laboratories in many schools has encouraged the addition of one or more 'lab periods' per week. But today we hear the term 'intensive course' used to denote 10 or more hours in class plus two or more 'labs'. Summer intensive courses may call for 20 hours a week, while full-time programs for social workers and the military run as high as 30 hours. It is commonly assumed that each class hour calls for an hour of homework. This lack of a common standard means that when a student claims to have had 'two years of

Chinese', one is left guessing as to whether this indicates a minimal 90 class hours per academic year, the current norm of 150 hours, or an 'intensive' experience with a grand total of 300 or more hours.

Students who do not start the study of Chinese until junior or senior year often find an intensive course the best way to catch up. One major university some years ago decreed that if a graduate student had not yet begun to acquire his tool language, he must in his first graduate year devote three hours a day to it - the equivalent of three years in one. After such a head start, his second graduate year should include 'fourth year Chinese' so that he might immediately begin applying his tool to research.

Competence Scale

Standarized programs of study will still need a scale by which to measure proficiency in the use of both spoken and written aspects of the language. The Foreign Service Institute of the Department of State has long used a scale, a modified version of which I append here:

Spoken Language	Written Language
Tourist Level	
Able to use greetings, ordinary social expressions, numbers, ask simple questions and give simple directions.	Able to recognize proper names, street signs, shop designations and numbers.
Home & Office	
Able to satisfy both routine social and limited occupational requirements.	Able to read intermediate graded materials and simple colloquial texts.
Occupational	
Sufficient control of structure and adequate vocabulary to handle representative requirements and professional discussions within one or more special fields.	Able to read non-technical news items or technical writings in a specific field.

Intellectual

Able to use language fluently on all levels pertinent to the field for which he is trained.	Able to read all styles of language pertinent to field for which he is trained, feature articles and official documents.

Bilingual

Spoken command of language roughly equivalent to that to English.	Reading and writing command of language roughly equivalent to that of English.

Secondary School Programs

Few people are aware how rapid and extensive has been the growth of Chinese language teaching in the last two decades. In 1962 through a grant from the Carnegie Foundation, a summer program was developed at Thayer Academy in the Boston area offering full-time study of either Chinese or Japanese language plus East Asian History. Offshoots of this experiment still thrive in a number of area schools. About the same time San Francisco State College fostered the introduction of the Chinese language into a number of California Schools. Two high schools in Chicago suburbs followed suite, while in Toledo, Ohio, a teacher, John Campbell, inspired an interest in Chinese which has outlived him.

Not all the programs stimulated by subsidies public or private have survived their initial grants. Some were attempted in urban areas where the local population had little interest in having their children learn a 'barbaric' language. Some public school principals, already overloaded with the demands of the modern curriculum, lost interest when the funds ran out. But where the plan was headed by a committed teacher or administrator, the new plant took root and became an enduring part of the curriculum. There is hope that my public 'prayer' at the Thayer Academy commencement of 1963 is being answered:

that the day might come when 'a child's first foreign language would be a cognate language such as French or German, but the second would be a remote language such as Chinese or Swahili.'

Articulation

College Admissions Officers are now being faced with the problem of where on their Chinese language ladder they should place an entrant who has already had one or more years of work in that field. Since high school courses usually call for only three periods a week, it is commonly assumed that two years at that level are the equivalent of one year at the college level. Occasionally the applicant has further taken an intensive summer course between high school graduation and college matriculation, a status hard to measure without the results of proficiency tests. The existence of high school courses in Chinese has made it theoretically possible to get credit for six years of Chinese by the time it is needed as a tool for research; but there is the accompanying danger that the study sequence may be broken at some point with a loss of laboriously acquired proficiency.

The work of Professors John Carroll of Harvard and Harriet Mills at the University of Michigan over a decade and a half has made available Chinese Language Proficiency Tests, the scores from which, if demanded in all transfers of students from one school to another, could do much to alleviate the problems arising from the cryptic claim to have studied x-years of Chinese. This is particularly true in situations such as I met last summer in institutions out of touch with the vagaries of American college programs in this field.

Facets of a Language Program

Out of the wartime needs of the nineteen-forties arose a few efforts to train teachers of Chinese. The native instructors often lacked any acquaintance with linguistics or teaching techniques. Today the need for such training is frequently expressed but little is done to implement it. There are several areas of classroom practice which bid for a teacher's consideration:

1. Comprehension. Students lack adequate opportunity to listen to Chinese spoken normally. Comprehension exercises in textbooks tend to be slighted because they 'take too much time'. Many teachers tell stories and demand that they be told back by the students. By the 4th and 5th years, it is possible to turn tales into talks - miniature lectures.

2. Discussion. After a reading assignment requiring that the student look up all of the unfamiliar words in the dictionary, the teacher is tempted to have the class in rotation 'read back' and translate as proof of having 'done their homework'. Waste time! Why not assume preparation and test by starting a discussion of the content in Chinese? - an activity far more challenging to the student!

3. Reading of Chinese materials, as practiced, seldom develops the reading speed requisite for research. A professor of Chinese History once complained "When I assign my graduate students Chinese materials to be read, they make a dictionary exercise out of it." The challenge resulted in a summer class in Speed Reading, in which the objective was to read Chinese at least one-third as fast as English. In six weeks the result was attained.

4. Recitation. Too often this means regurgitation and nothing more. Yet classes in Chinese are not so large that individual attention is impracticable. I myself have made memorization assignments to be followed by individual sessions at which the recitation was criticised as to pronunciation and rhythm along with talk in Chinese about the content. Such a session turns the traditional Chinese method of bèi shū (recite book) into a more creative experience.

5. The Laboratory is often more pretentious than functional. The person in charge of such elaborate equipment should be someone with sufficient mechanical aptitude to keep it in order - or else to know when to call in a technician; but he should also have sufficient knowledge of language teaching (and hopefully of the language involved) to guide students

in carrying out assignments made by the instructor. Ideally, let the instructor himself take the time to conduct his own laboratory exercises and thus increasingly realize the potentialities of a good laboratory appropriately utilized.

Summary

My conclusion is that the teaching of the Chinese language in the United States needs first to depart from the classical attitude that the sole goal is research, and to include among its objectives the occupational needs of all types of learners.

To meet the problem of student nomadism at home and abroad, there should be certification of all transfers in terms of generally accepted standards of content and proficiency.

The entire gamut of facilities in Chinese language from high school through college and into graduate years, and including summer sessions and full-time programs, should be studied to determine the most effective calendars for acquiring the needed language tool.

In the interest of teaching efficiency and the promotion of interest in study, newer techniques and gadgets should be appropriately introduced into the academic program.

Such matters call for more than erudite papers read to groups of nodding teachers at a conference; this has already been done to satiety! What is needed is action - group action - in these four areas, and in many others which such action is sure to reveal.